

THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Press Secretary  
(Kalamazoo, Michigan)

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For Immediate Release

August 28, 1996

REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT  
TO THE PEOPLE OF KALAMAZOO

Merrill Park  
Kalamazoo, Michigan

2:30 P.M. EDT

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you. Thank you so much.

AUDIENCE: Four more years, four more years --

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you, thank you, thank you all for being here and for your wonderful reception. Thank you all way over here in the corner for being here in big numbers. And back here. I think we should begin by thanking the Western University Band. They've been wonderful to us today, and we thank you. Thank you very much. (Applause.)

I want to thank Mayor Barbara Larson and the city and county officials that welcomed us here. I brought a lot of distinguished Michiganans with me -- Congressman Bart Stupak and his wife, Lorie, from the Upper Peninsula. (Applause.) Former Governor Blanchard; also former ambassador to Canada. (Applause.) Frank Garrison, the President of the AFL-CIO in Michigan. Your Attorney General, Frank Kelly. And many others. (Applause.)

I know that before I came here there was another program. I thank Beverly Moore for M.C.-ing it. I thank Linda Comer (phonetic) for what she said and for being a teacher. I thank Tim Eder of the National Wildlife Federation, Michigan Chapter. That's a very important group and a very important part of our commitment to the environment in the future.

Your congressional candidate, Clarence Annen (phonetic.)

I'd also like to recognize a Paralympian who is here from your community, a medal winner in the national goal ball team, Sherry Gordon. Congratulations, Sherrie. Where are you? (Applause.) There she is. Bless you. Congratulations. (Applause.)

I know that I'm in Comstock Township, right? (Applause.) So I'd like to thank the supervisor, Joe VanBruder (phonetic) for helping us here. (Applause.) And I'd like to thank Christie Kurambula (phonetic), our County Democratic Chair who helped to get a lot of you here. I thank her.

I'd like to thank the community members who are here behind me. First, I want to recognize Representative Ed LaForge. Thank you, Ed, for being here with us. I see you've got some signs here. (Applause.)

I want to thank these young people who are here with me today -- the Comstock Boy Scout and Cub Scout Troop and Pack 221; Brownie Troop 624; the Comstock YWCA; community citizen leaders; prime-time program representatives; the Kalamazoo Recycle Rangers -- I like that. That sounds good. (Applause.) Kalamazoo Area Math and Science Center; Vicksburg High School Adventure Club and FFA; and the Kazoo School. Thank you all for being here. (Applause.)

I want to thank my good friend, Senator Carl Levin, for being here today and supporting the environment in general, and for being America's number one fighter for the Great Lakes and uniform quality standards for the Great Lakes water. (Applause.)

By the way, I'm sure you all know we've still got some work to do on that, so we can use six more years of Carl Levin to finish our work on the Great Lakes. (Applause.)

I want to thank Katie McGinty, the Chair of our Environmental Council in the White House. She's done a wonderful job on this and many others things. And most of all, I want to thank Mary Brown and her grandson Stan Cook. (Applause.)

Now, to give you some idea in what happens to you when you're young as opposed to when you're old -- I asked Stan Cook how old he was and he said, "I'm 10." And I looked at him and I said, "Now, Dan, are you 10?" He said, "Well, I'm almost 10." (Laughter.) We'll I'm almost 49, too -- (laughter) -- in the reverse direction.

There aren't many young people his age who could have spoken

so well and so forcefully. Didn't he do a good job? (Applause.) Thank you very, very much, Dan. And thank you, Mary Brown, for your lifetime of commitment to the quality of the environment in your state and your area.

Folks, you know, I've been on this train the last couple of days going through the heartland of America from West Virginia to Kentucky to Ohio to Michigan. Leaving you, I'm going on now to Michigan City, Indiana, and then I will fly to Chicago. I've been on this train for two reasons. First, I wanted to see people like you in the heartland of America -- the people that really make this country go, the people I've been working for and fighting for for four years. (Applause.) But I also wanted to make the point that our train and our country are both on the right track to the 21st century. (Applause.)

For four years, I have pursued a very straightforward strategy based on a vision of what our country ought to be like. When all these children who are in this audience spend most of their life in a new century, the world will be so different from the world people my age grew up in -- different in how we work and live and relate to each other, very different in how we relate to the rest of the world; vastly, vastly increased opportunities, and significant new challenges. And I want us to go into that next century with every child in this country having the opportunity to live up to his or her God-given potential and live out their dreams. And I believe you want that, too. (Applause.)

In order to do that, our country has to create more opportunity and receive more responsibility from all of our citizens. That's the basic bargain of America. Our country has to remain the world's strongest force for peace and freedom and prosperity. And I appreciate what Mary said about our role in the world. It's important for America to lead the world. It's important for Americans that we do. And most of all, our country has to come together as one community.

All over the world -- this morning as I do every morning, I started my work day with a review of the situation in the rest of the world. And I thought to myself, how much time have I spent as President dealing with problems created because other people could not get along and because they insisted on looking down on people that lived on the same piece of land they did because they had a different race, a different ethnic group, they were of a different tribe.

It happens in Africa and Rwanda and Burundi. It has consumed the Middle East for decades. It has consumed Northern Ireland for longer

than that. It has rooted and caused butchery and slaughter in Bosnia we have worked so hard to end.

Why do people do this? What is special about America? We say, this is not a country about race. This is not a country about religion. This is a country where, if you believe in the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, the Declaration of Independence, it doesn't matter whatever else is special or unique or different about you, we're stronger for your difference, we're going forward together. And we have to have that commitment. (Applause.)

Now, we manifest that commitment in many different ways. I was so moved at our convention in Chicago when Christopher Reeve talked about his tragic accident and his determination to overcome it. And he reminded us that we not only have to continue to invest in research to try to find answers to the problems that beset us, we also need to deal humanely and decently with people who have difficulties.

Christopher Reeve came to see me in the White House and he said, Mr. President, I am so glad you fought to stop Congress from destroying the Medicaid program and ending its guarantee to the elderly in nursing homes, to poor children, and to people who have disabilities -- (applause) -- because not everybody who gets a disability is a wealthy person. And even wealthy people can be driven into poverty. And if it weren't for Medicaid, middle class families wouldn't be able to maintain their lifestyles. That's a part of our community. (Applause.)

I have to tell you, when Tipper Gore was talking last night, I was proud of the fact that my friend and the Vice President's wife has spoken up for 20 years to try to protect our children from unhealthful, indeed, affirmatively harmful cultural influences that will make it more difficult for them to be successful people. That's a part of our community, trying to make it more possible for parents to transmit their own values, not somebody else's commercially driven values, to the children of our country. (Applause.) I was proud of that.

And I was proud when my wife spoke last night at the convention -- (applause) -- and pointed out that we have been very fortunate in our lives. We've always had jobs where we could take time off when Chelsea needed us, but other working families need that same time off.

We've always had the best sort of health insurance. And I was there when Chelsea was born in the delivery room and when we took her

room, but Hillary had the need to stay in the hospital a little extra time. And it's wrong for women and their newborn babies to be thrown out of the hospital after a day if they're not ready to go home. (Applause.) They ought to be able to stay longer. That's a part of our community. (Applause.)

We've had a good week in Washington right before we left for this convention. A lot of things were done that will create more opportunity, give us a chance to have more responsibility, and bring us together in a community. The minimum wage went up for 10 million people. (Applause.) Ninety percent of the small businesses in this country got a tax cut. We made it possible for people in small businesses to save for their retirement and for employees in small businesses to keep their retirement when they move from job to job. That's all important.

We gave people a tax credit of \$5,000 and more if there is a disability involved if they will adopt children. There are hundreds of thousands of children out there in this country that need good homes. (Applause.) We did that. That was good.

We made 25 million Americans safer in their health care because we said you can't be denied health insurance anymore just because somebody in your family has been sick or because you changed jobs. That was a good thing for America. (Applause.)

We also passed the Safe Drinking Water Act and the Pesticide Protection Act to help improve the public health and the environment. And that was a great thing for America. (Applause.)

That's what I came here to talk to you about today. We cannot go forward together as a country, a country where it works for all of us, unless we have a shared commitment to protect the environment. And unless we want to protect everybody's environment, in the end, no matter how wealthy and powerful we are, the quality of our lives will be undermined.

Do you need a doctor over there? Are you okay? Over here? Where's my medical team? We got to have somebody.

Now, you think about that. It doesn't matter -- I don't care if you have got a billion dollars, if you live in America, in the end, the quality of your life will be undermined unless we save the environment for everybody. (Applause.) We all have an interest in clean air and safe water and safe food and in preserving our national treasures.

I can tell you this, compared to four years ago, there are tens of millions of people in America breathing cleaner air. We've cleaned up more toxic waste sites in three years than the previous administrations did in 12. (Applause.)

We have revamped the chicken and poultry inspection standards of this country for the first time in literally decades. We are moving in the right direction. We saved our national parks from an ill-advised congressional attempt to sell off some of them and under-fund them. And that was a good thing. (Applause.)

We saved Yellowstone, our nation's first and great national treasure as a park, from the ravages of mining. And we are determined to do the same thing and save the Everglades in Florida. That's important to all of us. (Applause.)

We have kicked dozens and dozens of dangerous chemicals out of the marketplace and quickly replace them with safer substitutes. We have increased community's right to know about what is in their community and what kinds of chemicals they are exposed to.

All these things are important and they matter. And we're better off because of them. We've also changed the way we do a lot of our environmental work. We've streamlined rules and regulations, challenged businesses and communities to come together and stop fighting. We've emphasized results, not punishments and regulations. We are proving that you don't have to choose between a healthy environment and a health economy.

In Michigan, we have worked very closely with the auto workers in the big three to develop a clean car that will get three times the mileage of the average car today for the 21st century in a way that will put money in the pockets of American consumers, increase the quality of our environment and maintain the dominance of our auto industry in the world for decades to come. If we can succeed in the clean car, it will be a major step forward to the cleanness of our environment and for the security of the work right here in Michigan. (Applause.)

But we have more to do. You all know we have more to do. You heard Mary's story of the work that is represented by this beautiful water behind us. And you know that a lot of these battles are won block by block, day by day. Carl Levin has been working on the Great Lakes for a very long time block by block, day by day, not just lake by lake, section by section. This is hard work. And we have more to do.

I want an America in the year 2000 where no child should have to live near a toxic waste dump -- (applause) -- where no parent should have to worry about the safety of a child's glass of water, and no neighborhood should be put in harm's way by pollution from a nearby factory. (Applause.)

Today, I am calling for a new national commitment to help protect all communities from toxics by the year 2000. First, I am determined that finally we clean up the toxic waste sites that scar our landscape and threaten our neighborhoods.

When I came into office, I vowed to strengthen and improve the Superfund's cleanups. In the last three years -- in the last three years, not counting this year -- we have cleaned up 197 toxic waste sites -- more than in the previous 12 years. We're doing three times more a year than were done before. (Applause.)

And we have done it while reducing the costs of these cleanups. The Kalamazoo River here is going to be cleaned up by polluters under your state's Superfund law. And some of the cleanup has not begun. But we have to keep working on this. We cannot slow down. We need to speed up the pace. These Superfund sites have been out there too long. And the longer they're there, the more danger there is that damage will be done. We must speed up the pace. (Applause.)

I am here in Michigan because 10 million American children under the age of 12 live within four miles of a toxic waste dump. And an exceptional percentage of the children who live there are children from the state of Michigan. Michigan has more at stake in this initiative than any other state, but every state's children are affected by our success. We must press ahead. (Applause.)

Today we must commit our nation's willpower and resources to meet a clear goal. In the next four years we will clean up another 500 toxic waste sites, nearly double the pace of the Superfund cleanups. And by the year 2000 we will clean up two-thirds, the two-thirds worst toxic waste dumps in the country. We will get them out of the neighborhoods where the children live. (Applause.) We will do it.

We need another medical team over here. We need some water and my medical team over here, wherever they are. Here we go.

Let me also say that our cities are full of what we call

Brownfields -- urban toxic waste sites. We have proved that they can be cleaned up and turned into homes for safe businesses that create jobs in areas that thought that they would never get any new jobs again. The most important thing that I am working on with the mayors of America today is cleaning up these Brownfields so we can create jobs in the city. Again I tell you, good environmental policy is good for the economy. It creates jobs. It creates a future for America, and we have to be prepared to do it. (Applause.)

We must bring the full force of law to bear on polluters who are willfully jeopardizing the safety of our people. I am going to send to Congress an environmental crimes bill to make it a crime to attempt to pollute, that will give us the power to catch polluters before they poison the land. (Applause.) The bill will increase penalties for those who intentionally pump toxics into our neighborhoods where our children will be exposed. And it will enable us to hit polluters where it hurts. It will give prosecutors the power to freeze polluters' assets and require them to clean public their messes. That is perhaps the most important thing of all. (Applause.)

We're also going to expand our community right-to-know law to make more information, practical information available to families easier and faster. Right-to-know will protect you here in communities like Kalamazoo because you can find out what's dangerous to your families. Once there is a right-to-know law, companies think twice about what they do.

In the decades since we've passed the first one, businesses have reported reducing toxic emission by 43 percent. Right-to-know works. Don't be fooled about it. It makes a big difference. (Applause.)

I have ordered the Environmental Protection Agency to give local environmental information to communities, including putting it on-line where it will be handy to computers, in one place by the year 2000. So that a parent could go to the local library or go to a school or just turn on a computer and immediately find out the chemicals in your community to which your children are exposed. That is a powerful early warning system. And it will help grass-roots environmental activism clean the environment even more. (Applause.)

Finally, let me say, we have to take further steps to stop toxics from getting into our drinking water. I signed an executive order that directs every federal agency that's appropriate to join in our



effort to crack down on those who would poison the waters and make them pay to clean it up. I want to see to it that Congress fully funds the Safe Drinking Water Act we just signed into law last month. (Applause.)

And in particular, I've made a commitment in my balanced budget plan to work with Carl Levin and others to continue to improve the quality of the Great Lakes. (Applause.) We've worked hard to carry out the Great Lakes water quality initiative, which Senator Levin did so much to bring about and we'll keep right on doing it.

We are blessed with magnificent natural resources. Every time our family goes on vacation in a national park, I thank God again for the good fortune of being an American and for all the blessings we've been given just by the grace of God. But I'll tell you, we've been given it; it's up to us to do the right things with it.

We have learned some fundamental things. Not only do you not have to hurt the economy to protect the environment -- what difference does it make if you have money if you don't have clean water, clean air, a good natural environment, safe food and a good public health system? (Applause.)

And finally, we now know that this is not a negative thing. We now know that one of the most effective ways to create good, high-wage jobs in the 21st century is to invest in research, in technology and in protecting the environment. That is the direction we're going to take and that will keep us right on track for the 21st century.

Thank you and God bless you. Thank you. (Applause.)

END

2:50 P.M. EDT